CHOOSING the right PATH

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THIS BOOKLET IS INTENDED FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY LEADERS AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE IDEA OF THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY AND THE USE OF LOCAL ROUND TABLES TO ACHIEVE IT.

Local Round Table Task Force of the British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy

Union of British Columbia Municipalities

Ministry of Development Trade and Tourism

Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture

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INTRODUCTION

Overflowing landfills, toxic real estate, fluctuating economies, agricultural land loss, declining water quality, traffic congestion, international competition, social fragmentation ... these are only some of the challenges facing communities in British Columbia. Complicating these issues is a shift in community values and priorities, which are rapidly evolving beyond a focus on jobs and economic expansion. Quality of life issues such as environmental protection and health are also driving the political agenda. Motivated by global environmental threats and economic changes, citizens are "acting locally" through recycling schemes, community economic development and Healthy Community programs. They are also looking for leadership from local governments, business and community groups.

THE PATH TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Sustainable development is "development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987.

Sustainable development goes beyond environmental management. It means recognizing and strengthening the interconnections among ecology, economy and community. This idea holds promise as a starting point from which communities can face the future. The challenge at the local level is to create the "sustainable community". Ultimately, this will require re-thinking the way our communities grow and develop.

The community is the perfect place to start down the path to sustainable development. It is at the local level where problems are most evident and the

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motivation to solve them is strongest. Municipal governments can respond quickly to citizens' wishes and their actions can have tangible benefits. A framework of local sustainability goals and policies also provides a proactive basis for responding to senior government and private sector initiatives.

One vision: The sustainable community has a stable, healthy population. It has a sense of place and history and a collective conservation ethic which includes other species. It promotes local employment, limits income leakages from the community and gains maximum local value from resource use. Its economy is based on the sustainable harvest and conservation of resources. It encourages local energy and food production. It uses appropriate technology. It does not export pollution or base its affluence on the draining of resources from other regions. Its land and water use patterns and transportation systems promote efficient resource and energy use, recycling of water and wastes and minimal pollution of natural systems. It provides all residents with an equal opportunity to have a good quality of life. It continues to learn about its own needs (Adapted from *"Planning for Sustainable Development: A Resource Book"*, 1989).

We don't yet know how to achieve "the sustainable community". There is no single model to work towards and few examples. That is why community leaders facing daily decisions may find the goal of "sustainability" to be vague. But we do know that many of our communities are not ecologically, economically or socially sustainable. We will be obliged to invent the sustainable community. Local governments will play a key role in these efforts, but they cannot effect the necessary changes alone. Only innovative partnerships among government, business, community groups and citizens will generate the creativity needed as B.C. communities adapt to a shifting economic base. Seen in this light, sustainable development provides an opportunity for community renewal.

Re-orienting our thinking and our institutions toward sustainability need not be expensive. Many measures which enhance sustainability are also more efficient and cost-effective. For example, if a community agrees to common goals, there may be less need for costly regulations and fewer delays from land and water use conflicts. Efficient neighbourhood layouts can reduce reliance on auto use, thus cutting health costs related to air pollution. In the energy field, Vancouver, Victoria and North Cowichan are among 26 B.C. communities that will realize savings from converting to energy efficient street lighting under BC Hydro's Power Smart program.

The vision of sustainability will differ for each community, since each has different ecosystems, resources, people and priorities. But every community faces the challenge of trying to "have it all" — improved quality of life within a healthy environment. Whatever our vision may be, we know we cannot get from here to there by tomorrow. Where do we begin?

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STARTING DOWN THE PATH

Starting down the path to the sustainable community will require long-term goal-setting: What is our community's vision for the future? What are its goals and priorities?

It will also require action: What will sustainability mean in our community? What actions will be needed now and in the longer term? Who should undertake them?

Local government has two roles in the process. It must work in partnership with other community interests to develop a vision and action plans. And it must "start at home", ensuring that its operations are environmentally sound and

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that its policies and programs recognize environmental, economic and social interdependence.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Developing a vision for the sustainable community and a path to get there requires the public's participation. First, find out what is already going on in the community. Various local "movers and shakers" are undoubtedly already involved in activities which can contribute to common goals.,

Contact the Chamber of Commerce, environmentalists, church groups, the Economic Development Commission, naturalists, the college. What are they doing to meet environmental, economic and social challenges? What could they contribute to a broader forum on "the sustainable community"?

Municipalities can take advantage of the expertise, energy and creativity of community groups through involving them in decision-making. Public participation should involve the full range of community interests, sometimes called "stakeholders". An increasingly common format for this is the "local round table". This is an advisory group representing diverse community interests which is invited to work together to find common ground and develop consensus recommendations on specific topics. It usually works with local government and the broader community to develop a vision, goals, plans or activities which promote a more sustainable community.

There is no single way to establish a round table; your community can choose a format which meets its needs. The B.C. Round Table on the Environment and the Economy has adopted the following criteria for the round table model:

- Uses an approach which recognizes the interdependence of environmental, economic and social issues.

- Involves balanced representation from community and/or regional interests.
- Uses a consensus approach for decision-making.

Most round tables and similar "multi-stakeholder" groups use a consensus approach to decision-making. Consensus is "a general agreement" which assumes that all parties accept the group's decisions, as opposed to voting models where the majority rules. This technique may require guidance, facilitation and/or training to be successful. The B.C. Round Table publication, "Reaching Agreement", provides a helpful guide to consensus techniques.

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Some of the key decisions in forming a local round table or similar group are:

- **Geographical area**: It can be one municipality, several adjacent ones or a regional district.
- **Participation**: Members should represent all key interests and be involved with community networks.
- **Responsibilities**: It can help the community define an overall vision, goals and action plans or address particular issues. Specific roles will vary, but success is more likely if tasks and time frame are explicit.
- **Liaison with local government**: It may include local officials as full or ex-officio members or it may advise government as an independent body.
- **Accountability**: A round table usually answers to the body which appoints or endorses it, in this case, a local or regional government. It also acts as a catalyst to bring together community groups.

More details on forming a local round table are provided in the National Round Table booklet "Sustainable Development and the Municipality".

To achieve the objectives of a round table, a municipality may alter the membership of an existing advisory body to achieve a balance of stakeholders. For example, an Economic Development Commission could add environmental groups or a Planning Commission could be expanded to include a community health group. Other options include using a task force to address a specific agenda or adding citizen advisors to municipal committees. Traditional public participation techniques, such as community conferences, workshops and public meetings can also enhance the round table approach.

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STARTING AT HOME

While the municipality is working with the community to define long-term goals and actions, it can start to "clean up at home" by looking at how it conducts its own business. Here are a few places to begin.

Do our programs enhance sustainability?

Examine municipal programs, including planning, development services, engineering, parks and recreation. Look at Official Community Plans, by-laws and budgets. Carry out a "sustainability audit" of activities and prepare recommendations based on criteria such as the following:

- Do they protect ecological processes and biological diversity?
- Do they provide citizens with environmental amenities, such as green space and opportunities for outdoor recreation?
- Do they promote energy conservation, environmentally sound practices and sustainable use of natural resources?
- Do they encourage expansion and stabilization of the labour force by creating local jobs and educational opportunities?
- Do they promote a stronger local economy through increased provision of local goods and services and greater retention of local expenditures?

- Do they strengthen community identity by finding common ground and reducing conflict among citizens?
- Are they designed and implemented in a way that is compatible with, and supportive of, local values and cultures?

Does the "right hand" know what the "left hand" is doing?

Assess whether your municipal policies and programs are complementary. Do they integrate environmental, economic, land use, servicing, social and financial considerations? Where they don't, encourage increased cooperation among departments and programs to meet sustainability goals. For example, delivery of safe and secure community drinking water involves watershed protection, public health and financial planning. Transportation decisions should consider air pollution, congestion, engineering costs and neighbourhood impacts. And land use regulations should encourage development which protects water, soil, air and wildlife.

How can we become more proactive?

Municipalities have traditionally focussed on their service and regulatory roles. But sustainable development requires local governments to be proactive in shaping the future. There are many options. It may mean strengthening municipal planning. How could municipal policies and incentives be used to encourage environmentally sensitive development? How could public access to trails, waterfront and other recreational amenities be improved?

Research may be needed on local ecological sensitivities, economic processes and social priorities. Local "State of the Environment" reports can also be useful. Encourage innovation. What about business-interest group partnerships to revitalize the local economy? Or municipally-sponsored education on sustainability for developers, landowners and the public?

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Cooperation with other jurisdictions will be essential to meet sustainability goals. In some cases, municipalities will need to work with their neighbours and with regional authorities to address broader issues, especially management of watersheds and airsheds. They can also benefit by coordinating plans and actions with initiatives of senior government and the B.C. Round Table.

ARE THERE ANY GOOD EXAMPLES?

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Few municipalities have adopted a comprehensive approach to "sustainability", yet many have made a start. The list below provides a sample of current efforts in B.C. and elsewhere, with the following caveats:

- Given the urgency of environmental concerns and the novelty of environment/development integration, many initiatives focus mainly on environmental management. As we gain experience, there will likely be more examples of integrated approaches.
- Most current B.C. examples are from larger communities, but smaller communities such as Campbell River, Kelowna and Saltspring Island are expressing interest in sustainable communities and round tables. Others will likely join them as these ideas gain support.
- These examples are mainly from individual municipalities. However, some B.C. municipalities and regional authorities are planning to collaborate in addressing regional sustainability issues.

MUNICIPALITY OF BURNABY

Initiatives include: hiring an ecosystem planner, forming an Environment and Waste Management Committee of Council and involving citizens in preparing a State of the Environment Report. The latter permits more proactive approaches to

1. Environmental Stewardship: includes community involvement, information sharing.

2. Balance: includes land use, urban planning, urban design, conservation, open space and transportation.
3. Environmental Quality: includes air, water, waste and risk management.
4. Municipal Operations: environmental aspects of all municipal operations are being examined — municipal works, physical plan, procurement.

CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT (CRD)

In August 1990, the Capital Regional District Board appointed a 21-member citizen advisory body on environmental issues. This "CRD Round Table on the Environment" has three CRD members, including the chair. It is responsible for undertaking specific inquiries into major issues affecting the region and recommending solutions to the Board.

DISTRICT OF MATSQUI

Matsqui's Environmental Policy Statement states that it will "consider the principles required to achieve sustainable development in all its actions and decision-making and govern itself accordingly." This initiative, which won an award from the Canadian Association for Municipal Administrators, incorporates a "State of the Environment" report. It outlines goals for improving the quality of the natural and built environment and for social planning. The proposed implementation strategy includes incorporation of environmental policies into the Official Community Plan and formation of a citizens "Environmental Task Force". The Task Force would facilitate public involvement, conduct public awareness programs, coordinate research and advise Council.

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The formation of a Round Table on the Environment is among the 29 environment initiatives underway or proposed in the City of Richmond's "Status Report on the Environment".

CITY OF PENTICTON

The city is preparing an "environmental management strategy/strategic plan" to guide development. As one of the few current efforts to address environment and development issues together, the study framework involves the concurrent preparation of two reports. The Environmental Strategy will identify key environmental issues and strategies, while the Comprehensive Development Plan will examine land and water use options, servicing requirements and financial implications. The two reports will be integrated to produce the environment management/strategic plan. A key goal is to ensure consistency among environmental, land use, economic, servicing and financial policies of the City. Broad public consultation and close cooperation with senior government agencies are key elements throughout the process.

CITY OF RICHMOND

The formation of a Round Table on the Environment is among the 29 environment initiatives underway or proposed in the City's "Status Report on the Environment". A Community Workshop on the Environment is proposed as a first step towards creating this public advisory group. A staff committee will be formed to coordinate cross-departmental environmental issues. Other areas of activity include energy conservation, pollution control, air quality and habitat protection.

DISTRICT OF SURREY

In 1989, Surrey commissioned a study of environmentally sensitive areas (ESA's) which produced computer mapping and a data base describing physical, biological and heritage features of over 140 ESA's. Fourteen management strategies were recommended to protect ESA's. These include

development permit areas, a new Official Community Plan designation, a natural drainage policy, tree cutting by-laws, environmental impact assessment and public education.

CITY OF VANCOUVER

Vancouver Council recently adopted 34 recommendations from the Task Force on Atmospheric Change in its 1990 report "Clouds of Change". While focussing on air quality, the proposals touch on many aspects of urban development, including regional air quality management, targets and strategies for reducing emissions, traffic management, alternative transportation, energy efficient land use and building construction, urban sprawl, waste, urban reforestation, municipal procurement and public education.

PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO

This city was one of the first in Canada to have a Local Round Table. With other community groups, it organized a pivotal public forum on "Our Common Future", to discuss local sustainable development. One result was the "sustainable Development Task Force", which spent six months refining the agenda for community development that emerged from the forum. Interest groups and the general public were extensively involved. The report recommends actions for both local government and various community sectors. Topics include decision-making, land use and transportation, ecological protection, water management and energy. The report focusses more on the "how" than the "what" in order to clarify the next steps.

The City of Peterborough, Ontario was one of the first in Canada to have a Local Round Table. With other community groups, it organized a pivotal public forum on "Our Common Future", to discuss local sustainable development.

Broad representation on round tables is seen as a way to engage public interest, produce workable and practical plans for diverse sectors of the community and build consensus for implementation.

MANITOBA

The Department of Rural Development offers consulting and financial assistance to Community Round Tables. Each one prepares a "Community Vision Statement", which is "a social, economic and environmental game plan" for community development, using citizen input. The document establishes goals, priorities and an action strategy. Broad representation on round tables is seen as a way to engage public interest, produce workable and practical plans for diverse sectors of the community and build consensus for implementation. Special effort is made to coordinate the Community Vision Statement with other local programs such as capital works, land use plans, business strategies, environmental protection and Healthy Communities.

CITY OF BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Berkeley provides an interesting example of total integration of environment and development. Its economic development strategy focusses on creating an "environmental economy". The strategy is built on the community's strengths: a richly endowed natural environment, including a greenbelt and extensive waterfront parks; leading edge municipal environmental policies; the outdoor-oriented lifestyle of its citizens; world class research institutions and the expertise of its citizens, many of whom are leaders in national environmental initiatives.

The following publications are highly recommended to help in "getting started".

B.C. Round Table on the Environment and Economy

- *A Better Way: Creating a Sustainable Development Strategy for British Columbia*, 1990.
- *Municipal Water Supply Issues*, 1990.
- *Reaching Agreement: Volume 1, Consensus Processes in British Columbia*, 1991.
- *Sustainable Communities*, 1991.
- *Interim Report and Recommendations on Regional or Community Round Tables*, Cabinet Submission, June 1991.

National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities 1990. *Sustainable Development and the Municipality*, Ottawa. (available through B.C. Round Table).

UBC Centre for Human Settlements 1989. *Planning for Sustainable Development: A Resource Book*, Vancouver.

World Commission on Environment and Development 1987. *Our Common Future*, London. Oxford University Press.

CONTACT THE B.C. ROUND TABLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND USEFUL CONTACTS, INCLUDING POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES.
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